

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 49 *Jesuit Higher Education in a Global Context*

Article 28

September 2016

From the Editor: Caring for Our Common Home - We're Doing Well

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Recommended Citation

Schmidt, Edward W. S.J. (2016) "From the Editor: Caring for Our Common Home - We're Doing Well," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 49 , Article 28.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol49/iss1/28>

FROM THE EDITOR

Caring for Our Common Home – We're Doing Well

The work of our schools is a worthy tribute to the insights and challenges of Pope Francis in his encyclical “*Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*,” which has cast care for the environment as a spiritual mandate and a justice issue. Sharing the stories we offer here is a fitting way to celebrate the first anniversary of its publication.

Back in the 1960s, a Jesuit friend and I were in graduate school at Georgetown. Marty was studying biology; I was working in linguistics. One day Marty said that he thought he would concentrate on ecology. *Ecology* – the word was new to me. My linguistic interest quickly got engaged. *Eco* had to do with the home, as *economy* had to do with running a household. And *ecumenical* had to do with the whole inhabited world, where people live, where they build their homes. That’s a stretch, but it is where the word comes from. Other coinages followed, like *ecosystem* and *eco-friendly*.

Ecology was a recently emerging study, not the same as environmentalism but closely associated with it. The first Earth Day was celebrated in 1970. Marty explained that ecology concerned not just this animal or that, this plant family or another. Ecology looks at how living things relate to each other, how plants and animals affect each other, one sheltering another, one eating another, two species whose survival depends on each other.

When humans enter the picture, they don’t always maintain the balance that nature builds. With a drive to acquire more than they need, to store up now to allow leisure later, they often upset that balance. But didn’t God tell us to have dominion over all the other living creatures? It’s right there in the first chapter of the Bible. But God called us not to dominion, which leads to exploitation, but rather to stewardship. God charged us to watch over creation, to protect it, to use it wisely.

Our 28 Jesuit colleges and universities make significant contributions to the movement to protect the earth that has evolved in recent decades. The stories in these pages witness an amazing variety of approaches to environmental questions, all designed to get something done. University communities seem not to need much encouragement to face the causes and the effects of environmental damage – destruction of the land, extinction of species, global warming. Students take the need for granted and

want to do something they see as vitally important. Faculty and administrators constantly look for new ways to build a new project, eliminate waste, save energy. We present these stories in longer pieces, in reflections or reports from students and alumni, and in art. A lot of people are making a great difference.

This issue of *Conversations* also includes two new short features. One is “Where We Come From,” a short history of one of the 28 schools. We will work our way through all 28, but with two issues a year that will take some time. We also have a teacher’s reflections in “Teaching the Mission”; our first column in this series is by *Conversations* seminar member Molly Pepper of Gonzaga. A letter in this issue from Pat Howell, the chair of the *Conversations* seminar, explains other innovations.

A great part of the enjoyment of being part of *Conversations* is welcoming new members to the seminar. This season we welcome Clint Springer, a professor of biology at St. Joseph’s University. A native of West Virginia, Clint has a strong interest in Appalachia and knows Catholic social teaching on the exploitation of that region. He has done specialized research on climate change.

That enjoyment comes at the cost of saying farewell. This year we say farewell to Jim McCartin, theology professor and director of the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture, who has faithfully finished his three years on the seminar. We will miss Jim’s insights and good humor; fortunately he works not far away and I am sure I’ll run into Jim from time to time.

Higher education has many issues to deal with, as successive numbers of *Conversations* show. A special section in *The New York Times* on June 23 studied a range of these issues, highlighting a lead article by Frank Bruni, “Student, or Customer?” Other issues included free speech, food and costs, sexual assault, and diversity. The next *Conversations* will address some of these issues as “Difficult Conversations.” For now, we focus on how our schools are addressing the need to care for our common home. We can always do more, of course, but that is no reason not to recognize the immense good that we do.

Edward W. Schmidt, S.J., editor